

# Ottawa and provinces need comprehensive policies to boost Canadian digital media sector: OTC

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If governments really want to foster healthy Canadian digital media sectors, they should take a comprehensive approach to developing the policies designed to support the industry. Focusing on just one or another aspect of the market won't cut it, says a director of the **Ontario Technology Corridor** (OTC), an organization representing a technology cluster extending from Niagara Falls to Ottawa.

In an interview with **Tech Media Reports**, Gerald Piszowski says governments too often miss the big business picture by focusing too narrowly in on individual issues in developing policy.

"Look at the history of the federal government of Canada," he says. In the 1980s, the government often targeted large-scale projects such as the Hibernia offshore oil field, but didn't necessarily support smaller businesses, he says. In the late 1980s, however, "everybody focused on small business." Yet the SMB approach didn't always account for the fact that small businesses needed healthy big businesses to work with as well.

As Canada seeks to boost its digital media industry via provincial and federal policies, governments need to keep the big picture in mind, says Piszowski, who is also VP of business development at the Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance, an OTC partner.

"You need to understand what's happening in the industry. What are the competitive factors that the industry is reacting to?"

Those competitive factors are increasingly global, he adds, saying an international mindset needs to be part of any policymaking. Examining what other jurisdictions are doing to boost their own digital media sectors, in the area of tax credits for example, will help Ottawa and the provinces strengthen their domestic policies.

For example, countries such as Australia and the U.K. are developing national technology strategies designed to keep their local technology companies from emigrating, making it all the more difficult for Canada to entice them to these shores. The U.K, which has lamented the migration of many of its digital media companies to Canada over the past several years, recently introduced an integrated national digital strategy, with a focus on upgrading digital skills,

strengthening the creative industries, and extending broadband and digital TV accessibility.

Here in Canada, Industry minister Tony Clement has committed to work with industry leaders to develop a made-in-Canada strategy for the digital economy, although he cautions that it might take some time to get a plan rolling. Initial work will be done this fall, he said. Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty [said](#) [1] in June that he's ready to lend his government's support and collaborate with his federal counterparts to make Canada a digital industry leader.

The lack of a national strategy hasn't prevented various regions in this country from vying to become major technology hubs. Vancouver has mobile-technology and Edmonton and Montreal feature maturing digital media industries. The Atlantic provinces are gaining a reputation in the gaming sector.

How fares Ontario in this Canadian competition? "We don't really see it as competition," Piszowski says, explaining that the OTC doesn't necessarily try to siphon tech talent away from other parts of Canada. Instead, the organization targets its efforts beyond our borders – Los Angeles, Europe, India, and the U.K. "We don't do any marketing in Canada."

### **The need for highly trained workers**

The number-one issue for Ontario's digital media sector is talent, he explains, with companies seeking a unique mix of skills these days. "You're not just looking for an animator or a programmer. The industry is looking for an artist with technical savvy. Now you're mixing the left brain with the right brain. That's a challenge."

Oakville-based **Sheridan College**, for example, is well known for producing top rated animation graduates – but they often leave the province to work for major studios elsewhere.

When video game maker **Ubisoft Inc.** [announced](#) [2] earlier this year that it would open a studio in Toronto – its first outside of Quebec and British Columbia – talent was a prime concern. Piszowski says he told Ubisoft's representatives to get ready for a flood of applications from Canadians working abroad and looking to come back. That's just what happened, he says.

He agrees that Ontario is better positioned to attract firms and support local businesses since the provincial government [beefed up](#) [3] the tax credit system for the interactive industry. He also gives the province top marks for its academic-business integration efforts, such as the Seneca@York campus combining the practical business-focused education of **Seneca College** with the traditional theoretical education of **York University**.

The rise of the digital industry may well coincide with difficulties in Ontario's once-hopping manufacturing sector, but Piszowski says he'd be surprised if manufacturing disappeared altogether. "The manufacturing sector will always have a strong place in the province," he says, explaining that 30 years ago, he was hearing plenty of pundits predicting the high demise of auto manufacturing in Ontario. "I still have yet to see that sun set."

And yet, times are changing. Ontario's manufacturing industry now relies more on electronics and digital technologies than it ever has in the past, paving the way for a stronger technology industry. "All of these things are converging. IT is seen as an enabler."

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